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All 4 service chiefs on record: No harm to units from transgender service

By Tara Copp, AP

Apr 24, 2018



Plaintiff Cathrine Schmid, second from left, listens as attorney Natalie Narduccia speaks in front of a federal courthouse following a hearing March 27, 2018, in Seattle. U.S. District Judge Marsha Pechman says she won't immediately consider President Donald Trump's new policy banning transgender people from serving in the military. (Elaine Thompson/AP)

Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Dave Goldfein told Congress Tuesday he was not aware of any negative effects from transgender personnel serving, joining all three other service chiefs in a rare public split with President Donald Trump over the issue.

Sen. Kristen Gillibrand, D-N.Y., as she had with the top military leaders of the Army, Navy and Marine Corps when they appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee for their budget hearings, used the opportunity to question Goldfein as to whether he was aware of any “issues of unit cohesion, disciplinary problems or issues of morale resulting from open transgender service.”

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"In the last two weeks Gen. [Mark] Milley, Gen. [Robert] Neller, and Adm. [John] Richardson have told me that they have seen zero reports of issues of cohesion, discipline, morale as a result of open transgender service in their respective service branches," Gillibrand said, referring to the chiefs of staff of the Army, Marine Corps and Navy, respectively.

Goldfein said he was not aware of any issues with transgender service members, but emphasized that each case is unique. Goldfein said among the transgender service members he had talked to, he had found a "commitment to serve by each of them."



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The White House's late Friday announcement was influenced by the these documents.

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Likewise, in earlier testimonies, when the three other service secretaries were asked if they had heard of any harm to unit cohesion or other problems, they responded:

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Navy: "By virtue of being a Navy sailor, we treat every one of those Navy sailors, regardless, with dignity and respect," said [Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson](#). "That is warranted by wearing the uniform of the United States Navy. By virtue of that approach, I am not aware of any issues."

Marine Corps: "By reporting those Marines that have come forward, there's 27 Marines that have identified as transgender, one sailor serving. I am not aware of any issues in those areas," said Marine Commandant Gen. Robert Neller.

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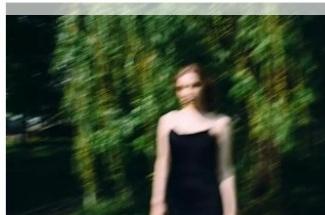
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there's 27 Marines that have identified as transgender, one sailor serving. I am not aware of any issues in those areas," said Marine Commandant Gen. Robert Neller.



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Army: "We have a finite number. We know who they are, and it is monitored very closely, because, you know, I'm concerned about that, and want to make sure that they are, in fact, treated with dignity and respect. And no, I have received precisely zero reports," said Army Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Milley.

Last month the White House announced that it would leave the decision to the service secretaries on whether or not to allow transgender personnel to serve; but also directed that a subset of transgender personnel – those with a diagnosis of gender dysphoria – would be prohibited from serving. Gender dysphoria is a condition where a person experiences discomfort with their biological sex.



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In his [February guidance to President Trump](#), Mattis also listed several other limitations on transgender service, including an extension of the amount of time someone would need to be stable in their preferred sex to 36 months and a prohibition on service members who have undergone corrective surgery.

Critics have said the gender dysphoria argument is an attempt to keep all transgender personnel from serving, because "gender dysphoria" is a broadly used diagnosis used by the medical community for transgender persons and not indicative of a more serious issue.

The four service chiefs, along with the chief of the National Guard Bureau and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Joseph Dunford, comprise the president's top circle of military advisers. Each service chief's

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The four service chiefs, along with the chief of the National Guard Bureau and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Joseph Dunford, comprise the president's top circle of military advisers. Each service chief's testimony marked an unusual split with the president and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, who have advised that allowing personnel with gender dysphoria to serve would harm unit cohesion and present an "unreasonable burden on the military."

The administration's prohibitions on transgender service are still being challenged in the courts; four federal courts have already overturned Trump's previous ban on new accessions by transgender personnel and the other aspects of the administration's transgender policy are now part of ongoing lawsuits.

About Tara Copp, AP

Tara Copp is a Pentagon correspondent for the Associated Press. She was previously Pentagon bureau chief for Sightline Media Group.

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